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HOW CAN THE COLLEGES AND HIGH SCHOOLS CO-OPERATE TO STIMULATE AN INTEREST IN THE STUDY OF GREEK ?¹

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In assigning my subject, the committee assured me that I might have the greatest latitude in the treatment of it. I am not sure, however, that they contemplated my moving bodily out of its limits at the very outset, as perhaps I shall proceed to do. For I doubt whether the college as such, or the school as such, will ever either operate or co-operate to stimulate the study of Greek. Whatever may be true of Latin, the day of an absolute Greek requirement is past. We are in the position of a disestablished church, and may as well face the problems of reorganization on the new basis—the basis of individual effort. We have fought behind entrenchments so long that we are a little dazed at being pushed out into the plain and in danger of maneuvering to get back under cover, when the same effort would win us the battle in the open. Indeed, it is quite possible that the hold which modern language and science have gained as our rivals is due, not entirely to the depravity of the human race in choosing the worse, but somewhat to the energy and vigor their champions have gained from fighting so long without the walls. If we deserved the fortress—and I for one think we did—it rests with us now to prove that in the open.

The main question is whether we ourselves really believe in the study of Greek, not as a means of livelihood for ourselves, but as a part of the general culture of other people. Let us be as generous and open-minded as possible. Many cultivated persons have had no Greek. There was once a town in Asia Minor where the inhabitants succeeded in extracting honey out of wheat and the tamarisk

¹ Read before the Western Massachusetts section of the Classical Association of New England, December 7, 1907.

tree. But the bees of Hymettus have furnished the standard. Yet, if we ourselves do not think it makes much difference—ways and means that lead nowhere are hardly worth discussing. An end clearly in view is half attained. If all the people who talk mournfully about the downfall of the classics honestly felt that the human race needed Greek and must have it (whether they cried for it or not), it would not make much difference what means they used, they could evangelize the world. Greek did not get its hold in the Renaissance by official backing—it went on its own intrinsic merits and the zeal of those who discovered it. If we let it slip through our fingers now, someone will rediscover it some day. But who wants to be responsible for the intervening dark ages?

Still, granting that the future of Greek is to rest on individual rather than corporate influence, the field for that influence does lie in schools and colleges. The recipe must begin with "First catch your hare." For this the preparatory schools undoubtedly offer the best leverage—an excellent leverage, even when the old official backing is wanting. Moreover, most of the smaller preparatory schools offer one great advantage—the Greek teacher is rarely the teacher of Greek alone. Some other subject not only affords him a *ποῦ στῶ* in getting at his pupils but makes his zeal for Greek seem a little less personal. May I illustrate from my own experience. When I left college I went to teach in a girls' finishing school in Chicago, which was just beginning to do a little preparatory work. Even finishing schools must have a Latin teacher. Because I said I wanted to teach Greek and Latin and it gave an extra flourish to the catalogue with no extra cost, I was put down as teacher of Greek and Latin. No one ever had taken Greek in that school and if I had known more I should have known that, of course, no one ever would. Fortunately I didn't know enough for that. I cheerfully taught physics in my superfluous hours the first year and hoped for Greek some day. I do not think I even did any intelligent planning of a campaign. But in the overflowing of my own zeal, if my pupils liked Latin I was delighted and assured them that they would like Greek even more. If they didn't like Latin I consoled them with the hope that they might like Greek better. In my second year I had a very respectable beginners' Greek class and always did have for the six years I taught there.

In later years I have sometimes wondered whether my own experience was a fair criterion; whether perhaps the somewhat looser and more individual methods of a private school did not allow an amount of personal influence, not only greater than was possible in a high school, but perhaps quite unparalleled there. But this fall I met a former pupil of mine who is teaching Greek in a well-organized high school in a fairly large Massachusetts town. I inquired as to the state of Greek and she said, "Well it's been running down in numbers. Last year I had only three beginners, and along in the year I told the principal that I did not think they were doing as well as usual—that I thought the very smallness of the class made them listless and discouraged. He said, if that was the case we'd better work up the Greek a little. We did not do much—only bore it in mind, when we had a chance, to let them know there was such a thing as Greek and what it was like and work up interest a little—and this year I have a class of fourteen beginners—good ones too."

This started my interest in the personal-influence theory again, and it occurred to us in the Greek department at Smith College this fall to see if we could find out why our pupils who entered on Greek, did so. By our arrangements practically all the students who enter on Greek continue it in the first year. So we asked our freshmen divisions one day to hand in the next day a brief statement of why they had taken Greek. We tried to guard against certain things which are apt to invalidate such statistics and said frankly that we wanted the real reason—not what they thought they ought to give. "If you took Greek because you wanted to, say so; if you took Greek because you didn't like the French teacher, say so."

Of the frankness and delightful naïveté of the seventy or so answers we had no reason to complain. Three girls indeed took Greek because they were advised *not* to, a few because there either was no French and German, or no good French and German in their schools. Perhaps a quarter of them were influenced primarily by some relative who liked Greek and a good half owed it to the personal influence and advice of some teacher—generally the Latin teacher. Indeed, it seems axiomatic that the main battle-ground is in the preparatory schools, and perhaps the cause rests in the hands of the allies rather than in those of the teachers of Greek. We may yet all have to dis-

guise ourselves as teachers of something else in order insidiously to instil a desire for Greek into the young mind.

The influence of the Greek teachers in a college is a step more remote. They belong to a body of specialists and each man is supposed to hold a brief for his specialty. Moreover, they ordinarily come in very little contact with students other than their own, i. e., those whom the preparatory schools have handed over with "hold fast all I give you." To this there is one exception—the field offered by a beginner's Greek course in college. On that in general I am an enthusiast. That course has been the apple of my eye for the thirteen years we have had it in Smith College. Yet when I find myself differing on this point with my brethren in other colleges, the difficulty is not that they underrate, but that they overrate, its importance. It is worth having because half a loaf is better than no bread. I would not have students cut off forever from Greek because there was none in their preparatory school or because they missed it at the age of fifteen. But I confess to incredulity in any belief that the world is to be restocked with Greek scholars by this eleventh-hour method—and even greater amazement at the attitude which I found predominant a few years ago at a conference of college teachers of Greek, viz., that the possibility of beginning Greek in college would react dangerously on the preparatory schools and that pupils would refuse to begin early, finding that they could catch up by a later start. In the first place preparatory pupils are not so long-headed. And our own experience has shown precisely opposite results. (I tell the truth for the general good, regardless of the inferences that may be drawn about my teaching of this course.) Our most enthusiastic pupils in that usually send their pupils and younger sisters on entrance Greek. In fact I once asked one of my banner pupils, some years after she left college, whether she would advise postponing Greek, and she answered with fervor, "Miss Caverno, I was on the dead run every minute in that course, panting and gasping for breath. I'm glad I caught the train, but I shall advise my younger sister to start in time!" Full-grown proselytes make good missionaries, but they will never be many in number.

I do not think that any department in a college is in danger of underrating the value of its advanced work, of what it does in the training

of well-equipped specialists. Not therefore as undervaluing that, but as convinced that to that need most of the colleges are fully alive, I shall lay stress on a part of the work which seems more in danger of neglect.

People often ask "How many of your students go on and elect Greek after the first year?" And if our quota is good, we tell it with pride. But perhaps the real test question would be, "How many of your pupils who don't go on are glad they had Greek so far?" If we are teaching Greek only to future Greek teachers, whose life work it will be to prepare others to teach Greek to generations of Greek teachers yet unborn—we are moving in a circle hard to justify. The world is full of other interesting things, and we think Greek the best start in them all. Greek literature is a beguiling and almost endless road. But whoever turns off at almost any corner has not toiled through the desert and failed in sight of the promised land. He has been in the promised land all the while. And wherever he goes he belongs to us. For that reason it seems to me that those of us who teach that *bête noir* of departments, required freshman work, perhaps need not so much new methods as a new heart. To a large number of our pupils it ought to be the crown of a completed piece of work. And their attitude in future may be a determining factor in public opinion.

Possibly also, the preparatory schools underrate the independent value of their part of the Greek course. Does anyone ever recommend Greek to a boy or girl who is not going to college? Yet four books of the *Anabasis* and three books of the *Iliad* are in themselves no mean possession. One of the boys with whom I fitted for college is now an electrical engineer, in charge of the heating and lighting for a famous firm of architects and absorbed in his profession. He left off Greek with the preparatory course. Yet last summer he volunteered a thing that half surprised me: "I've always been glad that I didn't know I was going in for engineering and took a classical preparation. I wish I'd had more, but all these years when people have spoken of Homer—I have known what Homer was like." It's worth while giving that to people who can have no more.

Now not everyone will follow our advice. Not everyone to whom we preach will be converted. I shall file a caveat here myself because

I'd rather do it than have someone do it for me. I've no doubt that girls are more suggestible material than boys and that in the case of boys the allowance for friction must be greater. But I don't think that allowance ought to reverse results. Professor Manatt once told me that he thought the future of Greek lay in the women's colleges—that Greek was pre-eminently a culture-study and that utilitarianism was crowding it out among men. Flattering as the prospect is of being left as sole custodians of a subject which only a generation ago was quite out of our reach, I don't relish the prospect of a complete feminization of Greek. Neither, I suspect, would the original proprietors of the language. I think, brethren, you'll have to carry your share.

But in dealing with boys and girls alike, I am quite sure that the best way to stimulate interest is to be interested. Organization which keeps our courage up is what we most need. We are not a labor union; we can't coerce the public into taking our wares. But in an age of over-organization and machinery, we might contribute to the world a thoroughly Greek lesson—how much can be done by the individual. Providence isn't always on the side of battalions—else Greek had not lived to our day.

Don't let us sit down on the plain of Marathon and say, "Well I was brought up a Greek, but to judge by numbers the Persians seem to be coming into style. You boys would better go over and get under cover on that side."